

HB 479

Improving Access to Healthy School Meals

A Critical Link to Academic Success in Montana Schools

This bill seeks one-time funding to increase and improve access to healthy school meals through the Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs.

**Montana children need proper nutrition
so that they are fit, healthy and
ready to succeed at school.**

To meet the requirements of the 2004 federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, districts are working to implement school wellness policies.

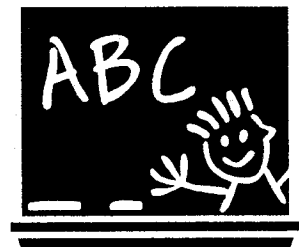
School wellness programs are focused on:

- * **Improving Children's Health and Academic Performance**
- * **Promoting Normal Growth and Development**
- * **Preventing Childhood Obesity and Chronic Disease**
- * **Increasing Access to Healthy Foods and Physical Activity**
- * **Teaching Children Lifelong Healthy Behaviors**

However, many Montana schools are struggling to provide proper student nutrition for these reasons:

- **Many school foodservice programs do not have adequate or necessary facilities, space or equipment to feed the children in their buildings.** Providing for these needs, ranging from small to large, would significantly improve the program efficiency.
- **Currently, 177 Montana schools, representing 22,000 Montana children, do not have a School Breakfast Program.** It takes a very small amount of funding support to get a breakfast program started. Once the program has been implemented, it is sustainable through the federal reimbursement. However, this start-up is difficult to do without initial support.
- **Participation in School Breakfast Programs is low; only 40% of the students that participate in the Lunch Program also eat school breakfast.**

(Over)



Why is This Funding Important NOW?

- **The availability of adequate school foodservice equipment is directly related to the ability for the School Nutrition Program to prepare healthful meals that are consistent with the nutrition principles of the USDA's MyPyramid.¹** Schools need salad bars to serve fresh fruits and vegetables, tables and chairs so all children have a place to sit, ovens and cold storage units for safe food preparation and storage, upgraded counter tops, and small equipment to prepare healthy menu items.
- **As more children participate in School Breakfast or Lunch Programs, they increase their opportunity for better nutrition.** Good nutrition is essential to physical well-being, optimal growth and development, readiness to learn, and lowered risk of disease. Even moderate under-nutrition can have lasting effects on children's growth, development, and school performance.
- **A high quality School Nutrition Program keeps students on campus, especially in the middle and high school grades.** For example, Ennis School District has seen a significant increase in program participation as a result of program enhancements and a wide variety of menu choices, attributed to the addition of self-service food bars.
- **School Nutrition Programs offer balanced nutrition in age-appropriate, moderate sized portions.** Studies have shown children that consume a school lunch typically consume more fruits and vegetables and less sweetened beverages for that meal.²
- **Montana has a child poverty rate of 20.1%** representing 40,395 children.³ Sadly, school breakfasts and lunches may be the only balanced meals these children receive during the week.
- **In Montana 9% of children are overweight, and 13% are at risk for becoming overweight.⁴** Rates of obesity in Montana have climbed steadily in the last 20 years.
- **The Legislature recognizes the importance of better nutrition, health and academic achievement, as affirmed in Senate Resolution No. 2 of 2003.**
- **School wellness policies promote better nutrition and more physical activity opportunities for Montana children.** Schools need support for implementation.

This bill requests \$250,000 for 50 Montana schools to receive \$5,000 grants, to be administered on a competitive basis by the OPI.

Sponsored by:

**Montana Dietetic Association (MDA) and the Food Policy Council,
Montana Food Bank Network (MFBN)**

MDA- Minkie Medora, MS, RD
Minkie.medora@gmail.com
406-549-3413

MFBN-Kate Bradford
kbradford@montanafoodbanknetwork.org
406-721-3825 X231

¹ *Issues Related to Equipment & the Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, NFSMI, 1996

² *Helping Children Make the Grade in Nutrition*, USDA-ARS, October 2005

³ 2005 U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov)

⁴ Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005

